T/SOR/49/2/38

WHAT DO WE WANT?

Some thoughts on violence on demos

This leaflet was written after attending the 'Social Justice' demonstration in support of the sacked Liverpool dockers on April 12th 1997, which was followed by a Reclaim the Streets party in Trafalgar Square. But it comes out of things the authors have seen on demo after demo, over many years of involvement in local, national and international class struggles. Many of the points made here have been made before, but it seems they need to be repeated again. The problems we talk about are unlikely to be sorted out by writing or reading of leaflets, but we, and many long-time revolutionaries and activists we have talked to, feel the need to point out actions and behaviour which we see as pointless and destructive, and the need for tactics and imagination when it comes to fighting the coppers and the state apparatus behind them. We know this leaflet is long and alot to read: we weren't willing to miss out important points. By it's nature this leaflet is written for activists and those who regularly go on demonstrations: this is sad but inevitable. The question of why the vast majority of working class people, whatever their involvement by necessity in day to day class struggle, do not actively get involved in the fight for a better life, is not covered here. Who says spending every Saturday on miserable marches has much to do with a better life anyway?

LIFE'S A RIOT...

It is important to state here and now that we are totally in favour of class violence, as one of many tactics against the state, the rich and powerful who run our lives, and the coppers, screws and other lackeys who defend them. We've been involved with violent actions in the past, been nicked, done the business, and will carry on doing so when we have to. The violence of capitalist society against us leaves us no option.

...SOMETIMES!

We are tired of boring lefty demos, with endless rallies, never getting anywhere, and want to kick back against the misery and frustration of the way we live, the cops, the West End, the lot. Clearly we also have to defend ourselves when the storm troopers attack. But if we want to fight and survive, we need to be taking them on when we can beat them. Sometimes we are strong and act together and the filth have to retreat. it's a matter of keeping an eye on the reality of each potential confrontation, the numbers, the police movements etc. People need to be clued up as to how to act as a cohesive force, not a disorganised rabble that breaks up when charged. The thin blue line have an advantage in their always being up for it, superior weaponry, a hierarchy that can co-ordinate and organise. We spit on their hierarchy - that's what we're here for - but this means we have to think about how we work together. We do have ADVANTAGES: we don't have to pass things up and down a long command structure, so we can respond quickly and flexibly; and we're fighting for ourselves, for joy and anger and liberation (we hope!). Some people **do** pick each other up, rescue each other when nicked, etc. We need to build on this.

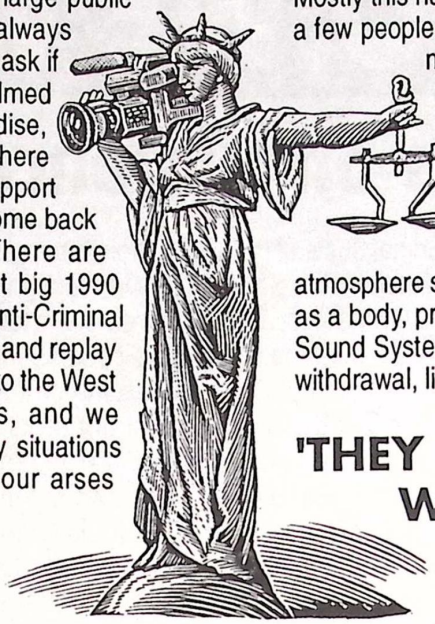
FLUFF IT UP?

The upsurge in green/environmental/anti-CJA action over the last few years revived the debate about violence versus non-violence. We thought the fluffy crew were on the decline after many had seen and faced police attacks and learned the reality of opposing the interests of the boss class. Developments at Newbury etc seem to show a growing section of the 'new' movements recognising the positive uses of targeted violence. Sad then to see the idiots on April 12th standing in front of the lines of tooled-up riot cops shouting, "No, no, don't throw things, Chill out, We're here to party!" and catching bottles aimed at the filth. One bloke was a dead ringer for the Mexico world cup goalie, in his multi-coloured top, stretching to stop every missile making contact with Mr Plod. Even the police thought he was an idiot.

CHOOSING THE BATTLEGROUND

Having said this, rejecting non-violence as a way of life, as an ideology, there are times when laying into the police is just not advisable. As a matter of tactics we cannot , most of the time,

beat riot cops in a straight fight. They're better armed, there's more of them, and on April 12th as usual we were fighting them on their own turf - controlling large public spaces like Trafalgar Square has always been a police speciality. We have to ask if it's worth kicking off in a heavily filmed area, isolated in a middle class paradise, cut off from our neighbourhoods where we know the ground, have natural support and reinforcements, can hide and come back at the cops from backstreets. There are obvious exceptions to this, the first big 1990 anti-poll tax riot, the October 1994 anti-Criminal Justice demo, but we can't simply try and replay these matches every time we march to the West End. Cops have learned lessons, and we haven't. We are getting in too many situations where things kick off and we get our arses kicked. It's depressing and it hurts.



On April 12th, the cops shut off Trafalgar Square, stopping people joining in the party. Large numbers of demonstrators were trapped outside the lines. Most tried to get back in at the north of the square, by St Martin's Church, where the filth were strongest. All these people could have busted back in if they had moved off and tried for a weaker police line - at least one group of 30 broke through at the Strand, the weakest point. But all these people could have taken the initiative, got together and spread the action elsewhere, partying, looting, whatever, along Charing Cross Rd or Oxford St. This might have forced the cops to spread their forces thinner and chase other outbreaks. People were trying to get this to happen.

It has to be said though that several of their actions have ended with a police attack, bleeding heads and nickings. Mostly this happens when the majority have gone home and a few people are left at the scene. It is surely time that as a matter of tactics RTS and those of us going on their parties/actions agreed to leave at a set time and everyone is encouraged to stick to it. On April 12th it was clear the cops were tooling up to attack and that most present were just interested in dancing, not fighting the Old Bill. A realistic look at the atmosphere should have told us when to retreat and move off as a body, protecting each other, defending the van with the Sound System, avoiding the worst of the batterings. Tactical withdrawal, living to fight another day.

'THEY WANT TO FIGHT, WE WANT TO DANCE'

- banner on April 12th

It is also true that on the day there was a division between those who wanted to party and those who wanted to hassle the police. Yeah we want both, but people dancing have to be aware of what's going on at the edges. Reclaiming the streets takes more than a dance, the space we have seized has to be secure and able to be held. OK it feels good to party out in the heartland of the british state. But there's a huge culture of talking these events up, slagging 'boring' politics and not understanding the hard work that needs to be put into making things go off OK, or having some sort of collective responsibility for the space we have **(temporarily)** liberated.

STREETWISE

Reclaim the Streets are undoubtedly a bright and creative group. They have an imaginative and subversive attitude to the struggles they are involved in. Their street parties have been well thought out, brought a lot of people together and been a good laugh. They have tried to link up young green rebels with groups of workers taking action, with some success. This positive, defiant, creative intelligence is always present in the working class. Demonstrations of our anger and resistance to the attacks of the capitalist class, are all too often dreary TUC/SWP hikes, with a march/chant/dodge papersellers/go home tiredness. Reclaim the Streets have attempted to put on events that are fun to go on, that leave people feeling good and fighting back.

MISSILE CRISIS

We should also be aware of the real impact of our actions, eg throwing stuff at the police. It's fun, works our anger up, and it can keep them on the defensive and unable to take the initiative. But today's riot cops , kitted out in helmets, boiler suits, shields, can fend off much of the ammo we have to hand. Placard sticks and empty beercans are useless, for instance, bottles thrown from twenty yards away unlikely to do more than wind them up. Obviously it's hard to take loads of petrol bombs into the west end, but how about high-powered catapults?

Throwing stuff can in the end be very tokenistic, almost a ritual, right we'll have a bit of a laugh then it's off to the pub.

There's nothing wrong with this attitude, but we've repeatedly seen situations where there's some throwing, people drift off and a smaller group of less together demonstrators are then attacked.

DRINKIN' IN THE ATMOSPHERE

One fucking huge problem is the pissed punk attitude. The

big group of individuals who come along to demos and actions, pissed and aggressive. There is a lot of fun to be had winding up the cops, but we have seen so much stupid behaviour. Violently provoking the cops in suicidal situations. Running up to riot cops and getting battered, too drunk to fight or run away. Endangering others who try to help them by being incapable, throwing bottles and sticks from too far away, with no sense of aim. Being generally abusive to others around them and showing no solidarity or understanding of when to leave things alone. On April 12th as many times before, Legal Observers, trying to get info on those nicked so they could get solicitors and witnesses for them, were harassed and abused by pissed twats. The Legal Defence and Monitoring Group (orange bibs) collect info so people can GET OFF, they're not Liberty lawyers, they're on OUR side.

Lets be clear about this. People want to drink, shout, abuse the filth, smack them when they can, but we have to do this as far as possible without injuring *each other*. It's not just about alcohol either. Stupid behaviour leads to nickings and battered heads, people doing time. So much of it is all about individualism, proving how hard you are on your own, when it's our COLLECTIVE strength that get results. We end up spending time and energy keeping out of the way of these idiots, or running around supporting them (yeah like they would do the same for us!) when they're arrested/jailed. All when we could be walking away laughing, having beat the cops and lost nobody.

They probably won't read this. Do we need to deal with these people? We believe in standing up for each other. But if you are handicapped by your own alcohol level/idiocy, if you have little sense of when and where it's worth kicking off, if you have no intention of acting collectively and supporting those next to you, YOU ARE A LIABILITY. Wise up or fuck off.

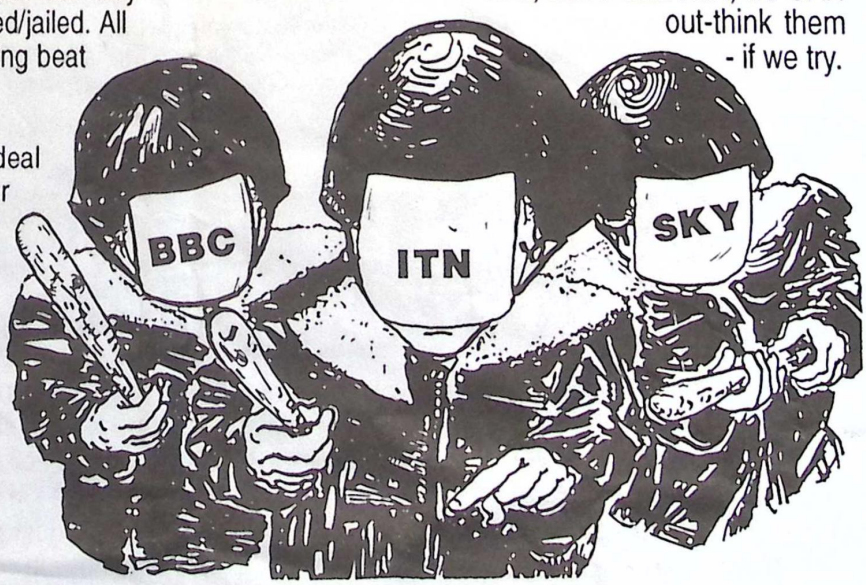
"At the end of the day, demos seem to become more and more meaningless..."

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, STING LIKE A BEE !

This leaflet isn't intended to glorify or slag violence, we accept it as sometimes necessary. We often have to face a hostile police force to get out on the streets and show our anger. But we want to WIN, stick around, stay out of jail and live as free and rebellious as possible. Fighting the cops should not be a ritual, or the be-all and end-all. There's plenty of people unable to fight, due to age, size, kids, etc, people too often written off by young fit men who think the revolution's coming after every tussle with the police. We need to stand up where we live, at work, with those we know, not just on demo.
At the end of the day, demos seem to become more and more meaningless, ending as either dull strolls or kickings,

with only the occasional Poll Tax Riot to warm our hearts with. To hit the targets we need to hit to take on the state, we need to think creatively about the whole demo thing. Marching into heavily policed territory where we can generally expect to lose a fight: is this pointless?

Some of the best actions of recent years have involved creative thinking - the hit squads/flying pickets in the '84-85 miners strike, some of the anti-roads actions (eg the recent mass sabotage at Newbury), RTS events like the M41 party, occupations of bastard bosses'/ ministers' houses or offices...We have to think on our feet, keep ahead of the state, not get trapped into routines the cops can cope with. We could meet up separately and do solidarity actions, occupations, starting trouble somewhere else? This is just a suggestion, but it might be wise to start talking about it. We have to start the battles where we can win. We can only rarely beat the state on it's own ground, but we are BIG, we're CLEVER, we CAN out-think them - if we try.



KNOW THE SCORE

YOU MAY BE AWARE OF MUCH OF THE FOLLOWING ADVICE. But here's some helpful tips for a good day out.

• **STICK TOGETHER.** If you can, go with a group of mates, people you trust. Keep an eye out for each other, count up after police charges, arrange meeting points in case you get separated. Have a list of names somewhere safe, with a mate whose not there, who has a number for a solicitor. Act as a thinking group. Know who's up for what. It could be wise to have someone from your group to have a basic knowledge of first aid.

• **MASK UP.** These days the Old Bill film us from the start of demos. If you don't want to get lifted later on, wear a mask or scarf over your face. Cops have caught masked-up folk by matching their clothes to earlier film. So if you can, wear old clothes you don't mind chucking afterwards, or plain, dark clothes that are tough to identify. Fluffy tie die shirts and blue faces may look pretty but they stand out a mile. Maybe we should be investing in 100s of Tony Blair plastic face masks.

On April 12th, some lads on Whitehall went and ripped flags off the Cenotaph - brilliant. They then went and paraded for the TV cameras, giving a good view of their faces. Use your heads.

• **GO EQUIPPED.** Some items worth taking along: Junior hacksaw, to cut through official locks and chains ; a D-lock, for locking places in our own interests; paintbombs,to cover cops' visors and journos' cameras.

• **BUNCH UP.** A solid line that moves around is harder to break down than isolated individuals.

• **UN-ARREST PEOPLE.** If someone is grabbed by a snatch squad, they can be snatched back by a determined small group. Especially if one or two cops have hold of them, it can be easy to rescue them. If you grab someone back, it's useful to swap clothes to confuse the cops, looking to rearrest them. Or suggest they move to another area of the fight.

• **THROWING STUFF.** People who throw stuff inaccurately from 50 yards back are wankers. We've seen to many heads cracked by bottles and bricks wellied from behind. Have some bottle, move up nearer the front and do it properly or don't bother. People to pissed to throw on target should be stopped, by force if necessary.

YOUNG, GIFTED AND MASKED UP

• **FLUFF OFF.** If you aren't into the fight, or are 'against violence', we suggest you move out of the area. Anyone standing in front of the police and trying to stop bottles hitting them has got to consider themselves a target.

• **DON'T SAY CHEESE.** Press and TV cameras were attacked on April 12th, but this needs to be stepped up. Small groups of us could decide to concentrate on this in a given situation. Or we'll find ourselves on the front of The Sun. Good shots could try to take out police cameras, like the huge flashbulb present at St Martins Church. Powerful catapults might be useful.

• **LEGAL OBSERVERS.** People with orange bibs, saying 'LDMG/legal observer', are there to gather info on people nicked, get people to witness for them, and get them a solicitor. They are not cops, stewards or lawyers, they're just like the rest of us, some have been nicked in the past, they know the score. Help them help you, give them names, descriptions, statements on people who have been nicked. *Everyone can be an observer* - it's up to us to look after each other.

• **USE YOUR EYES.** Watch what the cops are doing, if they're preparing to charge, moving back, vans or horses being moved about. Watch out for spotters pointing out people in the crowd, warn people who've been pointed at, move away if it looks like they've got your number.

• **KEEP ON YOUR TOES.** Don't stand still, move around, keep the filth on the run. Don't get trapped in dead ends. Spread out and stretch the cops.

• **IF YOU GET ARRESTED:** Try and make sure people around you, preferably your mates, are aware of it and can act accordingly. Probably if you're nicked in a 'riot' situation, the police will be too busy to interview you. BUT don't rely on this. Don't make a statement to police, don't admit to anything: 'No Comment' is the only reply to their questions. Although they can now bring up your silence in court, the best place to start making a defence is with a decent solicitor and access to witness evidence. If you're unsure on this write to London ABC, 121 Railton Rd, London, SE24 0LR, with an SAE for their booklet, 'No Comment: The Defendant's Guide to Arrest'. If you're beaten up, see a doctor, get injuries photographed. It can help in any case the coppers bring against you, or if you want to sue them.

• **ABOVE ALL:** Have a good time and don't get nicked!

Produced by the Hungry Brigade
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The people behind this leaflet are revolutionaries, with experience in many groups and struggles, going back 10-15 years or more. We're in it for a working class social revolution to abolish capitalism, with all the class divisions, wage slavery, poverty, alienation, money, hierarchy, etc that goes with it. For us, revolution involves us all being conscious of who we are, what we want and the strategies to get what we want - in day to day class struggle, as well as long-term vision of what kind of world we want. But this means more than just sitting in boring meetings or going on dreary demos. We want to take back our lives - NOW, not in some distant future.

As some dodgy bastard said: "The revolution is the festival of the oppressed."